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Jazz in Czechoslovakia / Czech Republic

The rich and diverse history of jazz in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic spans over a century from its beginnings during the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its early development during the young Czechoslovakian democracy between the two World Wars, through suppression or restriction during the occupation by Nazi Germany in World War II and, with a brief hiatus, the Communist dictatorship of 1948–89, to a general flourishing that began after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 and has continued into the 2020s. It is a history, therefore, that is particularly heavy with the impact of the political circumstances and changes that affected much of Czech culture.

Early History

By the first decade of the twentieth century modern, ragtime-influenced US fashion dances such as the cakewalk and the Boston, as well as Latin American dances such as tango, had reached Bohemia and especially the culturally diverse metropolis of Prague. One of the earliest mentions of the cakewalk appeared in a report in the weekly literary magazine *Zlatá Praha* about the dance scene in Paris. In 1905 pianist and composer Rudolf Friml (who later emigrated to the United States and co-created the successful Broadway shows *Rose-Marie* [1924] and *The Vagabond King* [1925]) composed the ragtime-influenced ‘Indian Song’ after returning from a US tour. World War I was to enable a significant increase in cultural transfer between the United States and Europe, but even

before that a number of recordings were being made of music in US styles such as the highly syncopated cakewalk ‘Černošský piknik’ (A Negro Picnic), recorded by the military bandmaster Antonín (Anton) Kučera (1872–1934) in 1910 (Matzner 2017, 406). The Café Montmartre in Prague organized frequent dance events from 1911; its owner, Josef Waltner, describes the pianist playing Irving Berlin’s tune ‘Alexander’s Ragtime Band’ (Waltner 1913, 5). Popular ragtime dances such as the ‘grizzly bear’ became known beyond the dance clubs, being mentioned in novels such as Jaroslav Hašek’s *Osudy dobrého vojáka Švejka za světové války* (The Good Soldier Švejk) (written between 1920 and 1923).

The presence of US troops in Europe during World War I and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as a result of the war reinforced the process of cultural transfer from the West, and not only from the United States. The political and cultural elite of the newly founded Czechoslovakian Republic (1918) had a clear orientation towards the West, especially France and England. The proximity of Prague to other important metropoles like Vienna and Berlin facilitated cultural exchange. Theaters, variety shows and cabarets in the city such as the Červená Sdma (1909), the Lucerna (1910), the Café Montmartre and the Rokoko (1915) became widely known for their ‘exotic dancers’ (visitors included as yet unpublished writer Franz Kafka and his friend and future biographer Max Brod) and dance orchestras like the Melody Makers, led by the singer and pianist Rudolf Antonín Dvorsky (Rudolf Antonín, 1899–1966), who was known for, and successful with, his own compositions in the Czech language. Especially in its later incarnation as the Melody Boys, Dvorsky’s orchestra copied the typical line-up of contemporary symphonic jazz in the style of US bandleader Paul Whiteman. Alongside a growing enthusiasm for jazz and dance music, especially among the urban population, there was interest too in artistic avant-garde groups such as Devětsil and Mánes and contemporary composers such as Bohuslav Martinů, Ervíн Schulhoff, Pavel Haas and the circle of Přítomnost (a music association founded in 1924)

around the composer Alois Hába. Hába, for instance, combined his semitone approach with contemporary dances in the piano cycle *Čtyři moderní tance* (Four Modern Dances), while Schulhoff wrote several jazz and dance music-influenced piano suites, plus the jazz oratorio *HMS Royal Oak* (1930) for narrator, (jazz) singer, mixed choir and a symphonic orchestra.

Of particular significance for the development of jazz in Czechoslovakia was the fusion that took place in the 1920s between early jazz and the theater scene in Prague. The most important example was that of the Dada-inspired, political theatre Osvobozené divadlo (The Liberated Theater). Here, the actors and writers Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich worked with the composer Jaroslav Ježek (1906–42), whose songs had clear jazz influences. Ježek studied with Alois Hába and in his early years composed music using Arnold Schenberg's twelve-tone technique. An admirer of the music of George Gershwin, he became increasingly interested in contemporary popular music and jazz, thanks in part to growing interest in this music in circles such as Přítomnost, as well as to his stay in Paris in 1928. In the 1930s Ježek became especially interested in the big-band sound of US bandleader Benny Goodman. This is documented in his Swing Band recordings of 'Tiger Rag' and his collaboration with Jiří Traxler (by then an established jazz pianist and composer in Prague), who wrote several pieces for Ježek's band, including 'Full Moon's Music.' Ježek became known by tunes such as 'Bugatti Step,' a two-step recorded in 1930 and played by a solo piano, brass and reed sections and drums. He wrote compositions for his band such as 'Ježek's Jazz' and 'Ježkův swingband' and made several recordings for the Czechoslovakian Ultraphon label between the late 1920s and the mid-1930s. Thanks to all of these – which represent only a part of his multi-stylistic overall *oeuvre* – and to his songs for the Liberated Theatre, such as the famous blues 'Tmavomodrý svět' ('Dark Blue World,' 1929), he is regarded as an essential founding figure of the early Czechoslovakian jazz tradition. An artist with left-leaning political views, Ježek fled the country in 1939 and died in exile in New York City on 1 January 1942.

Another important figure at this time was the classically trained composer Emil František Burian (1904–55). Like Ježek, Burian was active in Prague's avant-garde theater scene. In his compositions, for instance the opera *Bubu z Montparnassu* (Bubu of Montparnasse) (1927), he introduced blues intonation and jazz rhythms, as well as jazz drums, saxophones and banjo (Matzner 2017, 410). His interest in the music led to one of the earliest monographs on jazz and jazz dance in Europe, the book *Jazz* in 1928.

What Burian and others understood as – and played as – jazz in Czechoslovakia at the time was heavily influenced by orchestras such as those of Paul Whiteman and English bandleader Jack Hylton. Besides its exotic connotations ‘jazz’ for many meant a certain instrumental sound. Alongside the fairly newly introduced drum set, it was the saxophone that embodied the jazz sound and ‘revealed the sentiment of the century,’ as Burian put it (1928, 176; author’s translation). Apparently, its popularity led to a shortage of the instrument in Czechoslovakia and Germany (Herman 1995, 64) and led to inventions of nowadays almost forgotten alternatives, such as the Jazzophone, a Bb-trumpet in saxophone shape, invented during the first half of the 1920s by Czechoslovak Hans Rölz in Kraslice in the neighborhood of the famous East German musical instrument manufacturing locations Markneukirchen and Klingenthal.

From the 1930s to 1948

Initially, the changing political situation in Europe during the 1930s had beneficial consequences for cultural life in Czechoslovakia, as an influx of migrants from Germany in the wake of the rising National Socialists enriched the cultural scene, especially that of Prague. In the context of jazz, a relatively rapid process took place in which bands adapted to swing, most probably due to the takeover of former German-Dutch label Ultraphon by a Czechoslovak consortium in 1932 and the new release of American recordings, overseen by journalist and promoter Emanuel Uggé. Uggé’s efforts to promote and support jazz as well as

to connect on a national and international level boosted that development. Important orchestras and bandleaders, some of whom remained active until the 1990s, started working during this phase, among whom the most important were the Karel Vlach Orchestra and the Benny Goodman-influenced Hot Kvintet of Emil Ludvík in Prague, and Gustav Brom (Gustav Frkal) in Brno (and at times in Bratislava). In Prague, too, the Orchestr Gramoklubu (Gramophone Club Orchestra), which specialized in hot jazz, hosted the American pianist Joe Turner (1907–90) in 1936. During his stay, Turner made his first recording as a singer when he recorded ‘Joe Turner Blues,’ one of two recordings with Orchestr Gramoklubu (Matzner 2017, 411). The orchestra, which was founded by Uggé, followed the standard line-up of a big band, with a complete reed section, brass section and rhythm section. Jan Šima appeared as conductor and arranger. The repertoire covered compositions by Duke Ellington, Fletcher Henderson, Spike Hughes and Gene Gifford (Kajanová 2018, 305).

In contrast to the positive developments in the earlier part of the decade, the series of political and military events that took place between 1938 and 1945 – the ‘Munich Agreement’ of September 1938, under which the Nazi regime in Germany was allowed to annex the Sudetenland area of western Czechoslovakia, the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the German Wehrmacht, following the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939 (which destroyed Czechoslovakia as an entity), and the ensuing World War II – led to a period of repression, which, together with the deportation or emigration of Czechoslovakians, adversely affected the cultural scene in the country. For jazz as an art form closely associated with the West, the effects were particularly bad (see also separate entry on ‘Jazz in Germany’). In addition to emigration and deportation, other severe consequences of the Nazis’ cultural politics for jazz included forced labor and, in some cases, incarceration. The key members of the Liberated Theatre, Werich, Voskovec and Ježek, for instance, emigrated to the United States; E.F. Burian was incarcerated and survived several Nazi concentration camps; bandleader, guitarist and trumpeter Gustav

Vicherek was charged with ‘the murder of musical culture’ by playing jazz, and imprisoned (Matzner 2017, 418). In a particularly notorious example, the Ghetto Swingers, a band formed in Theresienstadt concentration camp, performed jazz there under unimaginable circumstances.

Officially prohibited from April 1941, jazz went underground, while so-called ‘light music’ was still permitted. For instance, Ludvík’s Hot Kvintet, which played tunes by US jazz composers such as Duke Ellington and Artie Shaw, continued playing in members’ homes for some time. These, and later bands such as Velebny’s SHQ, began to take on important roles of non-formal education within the jazz scene. Musicians and fans for their part continued to correspond (for example, via the underground newsletter O.K. [Okružní korespondence]) and to use private spaces to play jazz and to listen to recordings and broadcasts on British shortwave radio (its receivers were even called Churchillka/Čerčilka), all of which were subject to harsh penalties (for listening to Western broadcasts the penalty was death). Bands performing in public, such as the radio bands of Gustav Brom or Karel Krautgartner, devised strategies including concealing the American origins of tunes used in jazz performances, and also increasing the number of jazz tunes that were original compositions by Czechoslovakians. In this way they were able to continue performing both original and well-known US tunes live on air and in concerts. Despite the threat of harsh penalties, some free space could be found, especially away from the capital. Writer Josef Škvorecký, for example, then a teenager, formed an amateur jazz band in the provincial Bohemian town Nachód (Holý 2005).

It should be noted that the Nazis did not suppress jazz on principle. Rather, as early as 1939 Nazi cultural policy organized its own propaganda-swing with the big band Charlie and his Orchestra. In 1943 Kamil Běhounek, who had previously worked with Orchestr Gramoklubu, Rudolf Antonín Dvorský and Karel Vlach, as well as on film music for a 1939 Barandov-studios production together with Jiří Traxler, was forced by the

occupying forces in the Protectorate of Bohemia to arrange pieces for Charlie and his Orchestra in Berlin. Furthermore – though more research is needed to establish the details – the orchestra of Interradio, a short wave German station located in Prague that targeted audiences in Latin America and the allied armies in Italy and France (Vorišek 2010a), also played jazz pieces. In the period from the end of World War II until the Communist seizure of power in 1948 a reinstated Czechoslovakia experienced what turned out to be a short time of freedom between one type of totalitarianism and another. It was also a time that saw a revival in the fortunes of Czechoslovakian jazz. Looking back, the author and jazz fan Josef Škvorecký called this short phase a ‘nylon age,’ due to the contact with the American troops who were based in south-west Bohemia until the end of 1945, and who brought with them nylon stockings and records among other things. New developments in jazz – ‘modern’ jazz – began to be known, especially in Prague. Several factors were responsible: jazz journalists such as Jan Rychlik, Emanuel Uggé and the young Lubomír Dorůžka started to reactivate and expand their international correspondence networks. Bebop could be heard on British radio by 1947. In the same year, US promoter and manager John Hammond visited Prague to work on a contract between the label Keynote and the Czechoslovakian government to release Czechoslovakian music, including jazz, in the USA, and in return to release disks by Lennie Tristano among others (Billboard, 13 September 1947). These plans were thwarted by the Communist takeover in February 1948, but important knowledge had been shared.

A form of Czechoslovakian bebop emerged, strongly associated with the foundation of the club Pygmalion in the basement of the Palac Fenix in the centrally located Václavské naměstí (Wenceslas Square). Here, the band Rytmus 47/48/49 (it changed its name with each year from 1942), which consisted of members of Ludvík’s Hot Kvintet who had been active in the underground during the Nazi occupation, rapidly incorporated bebop elements. The fast pace and virtuoso solos typical of bebop can be

heard on recordings of Rytmu 48/49. In a version of ‘Night and Day,’ for example, bpm is around 280 and trumpeter Dunca Brož in particular solos expressively. The band included, among others, the double-bass player and vibraphonist Jan Hammer and the singer Vlasta Průchova (parents of Jan Hammer Jr., who emigrated to the United States in the late 1960s and became a member of the well-known Mahavishnu Orchestra). The period also saw the growth of a broad interest in traditional jazz, especially Dixieland, in line with a rapid rise in amateur jazz musicianship. Credit for this is mainly due to the activities of the Gramophone Club organization led by Emanuel Uggé and to the Australian Graeme Bell and his band, who played at the first World Festival of Youth and Students in Prague 1947. The band’s two-week stay for the festival in Prague turned into a four-month stay involving residency work, recording, lecturing and a 44-town tour of Czechoslovakia (Johnson 2002, 147ff.), mainly organized by Uggé.

From 1948 to 1968

After the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia’s takeover in the ‘Victorious February’ of 1948, the country became the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (Československá socialistická republika, ČSSR) and part of the Eastern Bloc dominated by the Soviet Union. This marked another major turning point in Czechoslovakian jazz, since the process of so-called Sovietization meant that the cultural infrastructure became controlled by, or closed by, the Party, without exceptions. From 1948 until the mid-1950s the jazz scene as a whole was confronted by, and had to deal with, conditions of politicization in the context of the emerging Cold War confrontation. In this process, the discourse of Socialist Realism and Soviet approaches towards jazz from the late 1920s (Maxim Gorkij) to the 1950s (Andrey Zhdanov and Viktor Gorodinskij) was widely circulated within the Eastern Bloc, and was expressed by the musicologist Gorodinskij in the publication *Muzyka duchovnoj niščetnyj* (Mental Poverty in Music), in which he declared jazz to be ‘a means of spiritual enslavement.’ For jazz musicians

in Czechoslovakia, working conditions became increasingly difficult, indeed sometimes impossible. The Pygmalion, for example, was closed immediately, while the Gustav Brom Orchestra was refused access to the radio building where it was due to broadcast, and its leader ‘disappeared’ into a nightclub for several years. Karel Vlach’s big band, which had been one of the leading Czechoslovakian swing big bands since the early 1940s, was subordinated to the administration of the state circuses ‘to accompany shows of drilled elephants,’ as Lubomír Dorůžka, a Czech musicologist and leading figure of the jazz scene from the 1940s, described it (Dorůžka 1994a, 132–3). Moreover, it was difficult to produce records officially and jazz recordings were banned for some time. The Karel Vlach Orchestra, for example, recorded several records a year until 1949 successfully, only to be subject to a recording ban from April 1949 to February 1952.

Jazz, or rather a Communist Party variant of jazz, was possible within the narrow limitations of Socialist Realism. For instance, it was suggested that ‘jazz themes [should] be drawn from Moravian or Slovakian folk song sources’ (Dorůžka 1994a, 133; author’s translation). Perhaps surprisingly, several musicians of the younger generation, such as Emil Viklický and David Dorůžka, did use Bohemian and Moravian folk songs as a source, but they did so without any political implications, echoing the practice of earlier composers such as Bedřich Smetana and Antonín Dvořák. The regime also appropriated the compositions and the memory of Jaroslav Ježek for its own ends by setting up an orchestra to play his compositions in the original arrangements in 1951. Despite Ježek’s own popularity, the public interest in that project was marginal. As a consequence of this general cultural policy many artists and musicians ‘disappeared’ (again) into the underground, performing in private spaces and at unofficial events and jam sessions such as the ones hosted by bassist Luděk Hulan in Prague, and releasing self-produced underground magazines (*samizdat*) such as *Jazz Express* by Antonín Truhlař.

With the deaths in 1953 of both Josef Stalin and the Czechoslovak Stalinist leader Klement Gottwald, and the gradual subsequent re-evaluation of the former's time in power, a small reduction – known as ‘The Thaw,’ after Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg's 1954 novel – took place in state control of cultural activity. At the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s Czechoslovakia saw the incremental consolidation of a small and alternative art scene, especially in the area of theater and variety shows separate from the large state cultural institutions. Numerous new theaters and clubs were founded, such as the Semafor Theatre, the Divadlo Na zábradlí and the Viola in Prague and the Večerní Brno in Brno. Members of the theater house bands were important representatives of the jazz scene of the 1960s (and partly beyond). The Semafor Theatre, for example, founded and run for many years by the musical actors and poets Jiří Suchý and Jiří Šlitr, regularly used jazz combos and big bands, including improvised solos, to perform their original satirical tunes or jazz arrangements of popular songs such as Kurt Weill's and Bert Brecht's ‘Mackie Messer’ (Mack the Knife), with Czech lyrics. In the puppet theatre Spejbel a Hurvínek, the hardbop oriented S + H Quintet appeared, led by the multi-instrumentalist Karel Velebný. Velebný became one of the most important post-war protagonists for jazz both in education – he began teaching at a jazz school founded in Prague in 1958, colloquially called the Jaroslav Ježek Conservatory (Kajanová 2018, 308) – and more widely thanks to his band and his 1967 book *Jazzová Praktika* (Jazz Practice). Also in Prague, a circle of musicians and enthusiasts founded the Prague Circle of Jazz and Modern Dance Music in 1956, led by Jan Hammer, which organized concerts, lectures and established international networks. Another important band was the combo Studio 5 led by Karel Krautgartner, which played in the West Coast Jazz style, especially that of Gerry Mulligan, without any accompanying harmony instrument.

During this time – and despite state attempts at censorship – the US radio station Voice of America, and in particular Willis Conover's *Music USA: Jazz Hour* program

played an important role in enabling jazz fans to connect with the international developments of the music. Musicians used the program to analyse and transcribe the music and hence as a tool of learning and adaption.

Mechanisms of dictatorship were nevertheless still very much in operation. For instance, the aforementioned Emmanuel Uggé, a longtime Communist Party member, faced imprisonment from 1959 until 1961, presumably because he planned to emigrate (Mácha / Poledňák 2009). In 1959 5,000 copies of a yearbook called *Jazz 1958*, planned by musicologist Lubomír Dorůžka and author Josef Škvorecký in co-operation with the Composers' Association, were confiscated and destroyed, presumably in connection with the affair surrounding Škvorecký's novel *Zbabělc*, published during the same year. Written in 1948, the novel describes the final months of the war through the eyes of a 21-year-old jazz enthusiast in a small town in East Bohemia. Critics of the work saw in it a defamation of antifascist resistance and a denigration of the Soviet Red Army, and it was condemned by the Czechoslovak president Antonín Novotný. The affair mirrored the complex political struggle around the extent of liberalization during the Thaw. Official censure of the book was one element in the short regression that took place in the late 1950s not just in Czechoslovakia but the Eastern Bloc in general. It was in 1958, too, that Boris Pasternak's novel Dr. Živago was officially condemned in the Soviet Union, even as it was awarded a Nobel prize.

From 1956 a flourishing of jazz and jazz-related activities can be observed in the areas of live music, music recording, jazz education and journalism, and in the number and diversity of bands and performed styles. It was apparent, too, in its adoption by the state. The 1960s, up to the Soviet invasion of 1968, with their more liberal political and cultural climate, have been considered the 'golden era' of jazz in Czechoslovakia by leading protagonists such as Lubomír Dorůžka (1994b). The state-owned record label Supraphon began releasing jazz, including 13 samplers of *Czechoslovak Jazz*, intended to give an

overview of the contemporary scene and its development. Accompanying texts provided background information and, occasionally, musical analyses by scholars and protagonists of the scene such as Lubomír Dorůžka, Ivan Poledňák, Miloš Bergl, Jiří Fukač and Stanislav Titzl. These journalists and scholars also contributed to or edited several books and magazine issues such as the yearbook *Taneční hudba a jazz. Sborník statí a přispěvků k otázkám jazzu a moderní taneční hudby* (Dance Music and Jazz. Anthology and Contribution to the Question of Jazz and Dance Music) (1960–9), the book *Československý jazz: Minulost a přítomnost* (Czechoslovakian Jazz: Past and Present) by Lubomír Dorůžka and Ivan Poledňák and the translation of West German Joachim-Ernst-Berendt's book on jazz (*Kniha o jazze* [The Jazz Book]) in 1968. These publications also demonstrated the collaboration and connection between jazz and contemporary Czechoslovakian visual art and its jazz influence by printing graphics such as Libor Fára's cycle 'Rytmu' or Josef Kubiček's 'Blues.' These developments took place in the context of state support for popular music in general during the 1960s which saw, for example, the monthly popular music magazine *Melodie*, founded in 1963 (with Dorůžka as editor), and an institute for musicology with a department for popular music established at the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, according to Fukač (1997, 62).

Evidence that the live scene had begun to flourish can be seen in the newly established or re-established venues (such as Café Reduta and the Urban-grillu in Prague, the Tatra Revue and Reduta in Bratislava, as well as documented local jazz clubs in smaller cities such as Plzeň, Hradec Králové, Slané, Ostrava, Olomouc, Ústí nad Labem, Slaný, Nová Paka and Košice) and in festivals. The first Czechoslovakian jazz festival took place in 1962 in Karlovy Vary, followed by others in České Budějovice, Mladá Boleslav, Olomouc, Plzeň, and Slaný. Then, in 1964, the first International Jazz Festival was organized in Prague, led by Lubomír Dorůžka and the composer Alexei Fried. This state-funded festival presented US stars such as Don Cherry, Louis Armstrong and the Paul Bley

Trio, along with several from Europe, including the Albert Mangelsdorf Band from West Germany and the Polish pianist Krzysztof Komeda.

The 1960s also saw the foundation of an umbrella association for the Czechoslovakian jazz clubs in Prague, the Federace československých jazzklubů (Federation of Czechoslovakian Jazz Clubs}, which soon had several hundred members. The association frequently hosted international guests, such as the Czech-born Eric T. Vogel, who was a member of the Ghetto Singers in Terezín, and West German journalist Joachim Ernst Berendt, who produced a documentary about the Czechoslovakian jazz scene in 1965, *Jazz in der Tschechoslowakei* (Jazz in Czechoslovakia). In the same year the association became a member of a network of international jazz associations which came together to form the European Jazz Federation.

The jazz scene also benefited enormously from the infrastructure of the state radio station, with its headquarters in Prague and departments in Brno and Bratislava. In 1960 two big bands were founded, the radio dance orchestra and the radio jazz orchestra, both led until 1968 by Karel Krautgartner. While the dance orchestra played pieces of popular music, partly with strings, the jazz orchestra was able to focus on jazz compositions. The stylistic spectrum ranged from Dixieland jazz to the remarkable Third Stream compositions of Czechoslovakian Pavel Blatný. Frequent radio and TV shows covering jazz appeared, among them *Vinárna U Pavouka* (The Spider's Wine Tavern). This satire-and-jazz-program, which ran from 1965 to 1969, was led by celebrated Czechoslovakian actors and scriptwriters Zdeněk Svěrák and Jiří Šebánek.

The state-run Czechoslovakian concert agency allowed more and more musicians to play abroad, including in non-socialist countries. Among others, the Pražsky Dixieland band played in Denmark in 1962, Belgium in 1963 and Austria in 1967, the Reduta kvintet, with trumpeter Laco Déczi, played in Germany, Poland, Austria and Egypt in 1965 and Luděk Hulan performed at the Montreux Festival in Switzerland in 1966. The

international caliber of Czechoslovakian jazz musicians and composers was confirmed when at a jazz competition in Vienna in 1966 organized by Austrian pianist and composer Friedrich Gulda and with a jury that included Julian ‘Cannonball’ Adderley, Art Farmer and Austrian-born Josef Erich ‘Joe’ Zawinul, seven Czechoslovakians were among the finalists. Three of them in particular became well known in the United States after their emigration there in the late 1960s: the bassist Jiří Mraz (Oscar Peterson and the Thad Jones/Mel Lewis Orchestra, among others), the bassist Miroslav Vitouš (Weather Report) and the pianist Jan Hammer Jr. (Mahavishnu Orchestra). Hammer and Vitouš had already established themselves at a very young age, mainly with the Junior Trio, which was featured in the International Jazz Festival Prague and on the Supraphon LP, *6th Review of Jazz in Czechoslovakia*, in 1965. Hammer’s future as a leading jazz figure in Europe was predicted in the same year by Eric T. Vogel (the trumpeter in the Terezín concentration camp, mentioned above) after he gave a talk at the Federation of Czechoslovakian Jazz Clubs in Prague, and subsequently visited several of them to see live jazz (Vogel 1965, 223).

From 1968 to 1989

After the period of reform under First Secretary Alexander Dubček known as the Prague Spring, which began in January 1968, and the subsequent Soviet invasion in August of that year, the politics of ‘normalization’ re-established harsh conditions for society and culture. Due to the repressive cultural climate which prevailed until 1989/90, the jazz scene experienced a certain isolation from the Western scenes and, again, had to develop ‘survival’ patterns (Dorůžka 1973). Persecution, surveillance and interrogation of the cultural scenes in particular reached a new highpoint. The previously mentioned jazz association was forced to dissolve. However, new groups did become active again and new initiatives did take place with, for instance, a new club founded in Olomouc in 1971 and

new festivals such as the Prague Jazz Days (1974–82). A new organization, Jazzová Sekce (Jazz Section) was officially registered in 1971 as part of the Musicians Union and became widely known. Due to its inclusion of contemporary developments in rock music and the arts in general in its purview, its openness to political dissidents, its distribution of forbidden *samizdat* literature and its broad network of more than 8,000 registered fans, the Jazz Section was of particular interest to the Czechoslovakian Secret Service (StB) (Bohlman et al. 2018). Banned in 1984, it continued working in the underground, and the imprisonment of several leading figures such as Karel Srp in 1986 raised international attention.

Established bands such as Karel Velebný's SHQ and Luděk Hulan's Jazz Sanatorium and the big bands of Gustav Brom and Jaromír Hnilička did not embrace the newer developments of jazz rock fusion and free jazz. Among the few who did were Martin Kratovíl's Jazz Q and the saxophonist and flutist Jiří Stivín. The latter performed in a wide range of musical styles from early Renaissance and Baroque adaptions, Bohemian and Moravian folk songs to free jazz, for instance in the duo System Tandem (1972–7) with guitarist Rudolf Dašek. A new big band emerged successfully in 1974, the Prague Big Band led by Milan Svoboda, who composed tunes heavily inspired by Duke Ellington but also incorporated jazz-rock elements. Another successful new jazz talent pianist Emil Viklický, who studied at the Berklee College of Music in Boston, USA, in 1977–8 and collaborated with Bill Frisell among others, merged modal jazz with Moravian folk songs. In 2004 his composition *The Mystery of Man*, based on texts by author and former Czech president Václav Havel, was performed by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, led by Wynton Marsalis.

In 1980 Slovakian Peter Lipa and Czech Luboš Andršt formed the Lipa–Andršt Blues Band, some of whose members had played in the fusion band Energetic in the previous decade. The new band became well known for its repertoire of electric blues and

jazz-rock. Vocal jazz became popular again, in particular due to the workshop-cum-concert Volkaliza (1981) organized by singer Jana Koubková. Another well-known female singer was Mirka Křivánková, who covered a wide range of jazz styles with her vocal range of four octaves.

Despite these activities, the Communist era resulted in an overall downturn of the jazz scene. Emigration of key figures had already begun in 1938, with another highpoint in 1948, when important players in the scene, such as Lumír Broz, Jiří Traxler and Kamil Běhounek, left the newly established Communist Czechoslovakia. In the following decades this continued, especially after the events of 1968 and its ensuing period of ‘normalization.’ Among those who left were the bassist Milan Pilar (SHQ and other ensembles), the saxophonist Jan Konopásek (Studio 5, SHQ), the drummer Milan Mader (SHQ and other ensembles), the drummer Miroslav Vitouš, the pianist Jan Hammer Jr., the long-time radio big band leader Karel Krautgartner and the writers and jazz fans Josef Škvorecký and Milan Kundera.

From 1989 to the 2020s

In late 1989 Communist rule in Czechoslovakia came to an end with the Velvet Revolution, which was followed by transition to democracy and the eventual establishment of the two independent states of the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993. In the new President, Václav Havel, a former dissident, Czech jazz found an important supporter. He frequently presented jazz musicians to the international political elite and invited guests to the Reduta club. US president Bill Clinton, for instance, joined a jam on ‘Summertime’ among other tunes in 1994 after Havel presented him with a Czech-made Amati tenor saxophone.

With the political and economic transformation came the establishment of a market economy, with its accompanying privatization process, and accession to the European

Union (2004) and the Schengen area (2007). Following these changes, the jazz scene began to open up once more, thanks to international access to goods, freedom to travel, the opportunity to set up private endeavors such as recording studios, clubs, etc., as well as the increasing numbers of foreign visitors and expatriates. Several musicians took the opportunity to study abroad and enriched the scene with their experiences and international networks after their return. They include the bassist Jaromír Honzák, who studied at Berklee College in 1989/90, and has been a leading figure and educator since the mid-1980s, and guitarist David Dorůžka, grandson of Lubomí, who also studied at Berklee from 1999 to 2003, lived for some time in New York City and has been a successful bandleader and central protagonist of the Czech scene since the mid-2000s. Performing frequently with international groups, Dorůžka developed a remarkable tone with his melodic and sensitive yet also virtuoso postbop-oriented playing style. Double bass-player Robert Balzar, meanwhile, with his piano trio, has collaborated with guitarist John Abercrombie and the Czech rock singer Dan Bárta and gained a wider popularity among non-jazz fans.

The 1990s and 2000s saw a flourishing live jazz scene with new or re-established festivals such as the International Jazz Festival Prague, the AghaRTA Prague Jazz Festival (1992), the Jazz Goes To Town in Hradec Králove (1995), the Jazzfest in Brno (2002) and the Bohemia JazzFest. The latter is one of the biggest jazz festivals in Europe and is located in several Czech cities. New clubs and venues such as the AghaRTA (1991), U Malého Glena (1995), U staré paní (2002) and the Jazz Dock in Prague (2009) were established and frequently host national and international bands and musicians besides regular jam sessions.

Growth in this period was not confined to the live scene. In education, in addition to the established Jaroslav Ježek Conservatory (Konzervatoř Jaroslava Ježka) with its college VOŠ, two new jazz departments opened up, one at the Janáček Academy of Music

and Performing Arts in Brno in 2009 and the other at the Academy for Performing Arts (HAMU) in Prague in 2011. In 2008 the Česká Jazzová Společnost (Czech Jazz Society) organized an international jazz workshop in Prague that has since become an annual event. Developments also took place in the record industry. In 2007 the label Animal Music was founded in Prague, establishing itself in due course as an important protagonist and supporter of the contemporary jazz scene in the Czech Republic. Since its inception, Animal Music has released albums by almost every important contemporary jazz artist in the country, including Jaromír Honzak, David Dorůžka, pianist Beata Hlavenková, the large ensemble Vertigo and organ player Ondřej Pivec. Meanwhile, in the broadcast media public national radio established the new program Czech Radio Jazz in 2013 and continues to award a prize for the best jazz album of the year. In the Slovak Republic the Bratislava Jazz Days (Bratislavské jazzové dni), an annual festival that has run since 1975, presents international jazz stars and frequently also features Slovak groups and musicians such as pianist Eugen Vizvary and newcomer Tibor Feledi's Kairos Quintet, the latter of whom among other things, play Slovakian children's songs in a multi-stylistic form of contemporary jazz.

In the early 2020s the number of promising young artists – for example, singer and bandleader Eliška Svobodová with her ensemble Fanfán Tulipán, and pianist Nikol Boková and the trio Treetop, consisting of accordion, trombone and double bass – point to a rich and continuing scene in the Czech Republic

Politics, Historical Change and the Specificity of Jazz

The history of Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic has been influenced to a remarkable extent by numerous historical caesuras, each of which occurred in the eighth year of a different twentieth-century decade. The years 1918, 1938, 1948 and 1968 are remembered as having a symbolic charge, since they embody the establishment as well as

destruction or containment of democratic or liberal developments by outside powers (Táček et al. 2008, 7). All these events had important consequences for the cultural and artistic scenes, and jazz in particular, ranging from almost unrestricted growth and state-support through politicization, ideologization and instrumentalization up to suppression and prohibition. While jazz flourished during the first Czechoslovak democracy after World War I ended in 1918, not least because of the strong multi-cultural element that had developed in Czechoslovak society, with its Czech, German and Jewish communities (especially in Prague), in 1938 and for more than five decades thereafter jazz became a highly political issue in two different, enforced totalitarian systems. One of the biggest effects of these political developments was the emigration of many talented jazz musicians and composers, which Lubomír Dorůžka (1994, 140), referring to the artistic scene in general, described as a ‘mass exodus.’

From its first arrival in the country to the early twenty-first century jazz has spent longer under communist influence than any other circumstance or ideology. With the usurpation of the state’s power by the Czechoslovakian Communist Party in February 1948, state socialism following the Stalinist track was installed (Naimak 2010, 187). Czechoslovakia was placed in the context of the emerging Cold War, within which culture played a special role (Vowinkel et al. 2012: *passim*). In state socialism, ‘culture’ in general was understood by the Party at the time as a politically controlled acquisition of the material world. The artist therefore was seen as ‘budovatel’ (builder) for the socialist authorities (Knapík 2005, 252), while young people were seen as the future builders of communist society, as Lenin put it in his speech on the role of youth organizations in 1920 – hence the importance of educating the young and of the control of their activities (Gienow-Hecht 2010, 404). The discourse on jazz in Czechoslovakia, especially during the late 1940s and 1950s but almost up to the Velvet Revolution of 1989/90, was dependent on and reiterated previous discourses in the Soviet Union, where the politicization of jazz had already begun in the late 1920s with Maxim Gorkij’s 1929 article “O muzyke tolstych” (About the Music of the Fat

Men; author's translation). The political-aesthetic set of rules, called Socialist Realism, which Gorkij and Andrej Ždanov established in 1932, was remarkably vague in regard to music, but rejected in particular contemporary and above all Western musical developments. The 1930s saw intense discussion about an acceptable form of jazz in the Soviet Union (Lücke 2004), a debate which was further heightened by the emergence of the Cold War. Gorodinskij's 1950 monograph on 'mental poverty in music,' mentioned earlier, was translated multiple times and widely distributed behind the Iron Curtain. Following the publication of a translation in Czechoslovakia in 1952 the book was enthusiastically received by the Czechoslovakian political and cultural elite, most notably by music critic Antonín Sychra and his book *Stranická hudební kritika spolutvůrce nové hudby* (A Party Musical Critique of the Co-creators of New Music) in 1952. In 1967 it was designated as a 'kardinálním spisem' (magnum opus) of the politicization of jazz by Czechoslovaks Dorůžka and Poledňák (1967, 38). These publications further reveal the multiple layers of dominant discursive structures: not only was Socialist Realism beset by the ambivalence within arguments over its 'correct' form, but also forms of racism, anti-Semitism and homophobia were inherent within it, as was an aesthetic dichotomy between serious and light music, in which written art works were considered real art and improvised music merely entertainment.

Understanding the politicization of jazz in everyday life in Czechoslovakia requires a nuanced approach. While many voices spoke in support of the claim – also promoted by the United States – that jazz was the sound of freedom, it does not follow that jazz under state socialism can simply be described as opposition or protest; rather, it needs to be seen as residing along a continuum in which at one end there are clear political implications, to a position at the other end in which there is an almost autopoietic occupation with the music under whatever conditions, including the imagination and creation of a self-image that could be seen as oppositional. That allows responses to the political circumstances to be unraveled in such a way that there are degrees of rejection and negation but also of adaptation and

adjustment. For instance, Emanuel Uggé, one of the most important figures for the development of the jazz scene in Czechoslovakia since the 1930s, argued in 1949, a year after the Communist coup, that ‘the real jazz’ has some sense of revolution, and aims therefore ‘to free the creative power of the people from capitalism’ (cited in Macek 1997, 55). Uggé was able to adjust to Socialist arguments in order to keep supporting his beloved – and behind the Iron Curtain fairly accepted – traditional jazz and swing, whereas when those same arguments, such as the incontestable Socialist Realism, were applied to modern jazz the result was devaluation. In contrast, parts of the jazz scene in the 1980s, mainly in the Jazz Section (see above), developed political ambitions and experienced suppression as a result. This complexity must also be seen in the light of *glasnost* and *perestroika* – the political and economic reforms intended to modernize the Soviet state in the 1980s – as well as the oppressions experienced in previous decades (Kouřil 2009; Motyčka 2010, 2016).

A similar problem occurs when the area of co-operation with the secret service StB (Státní bezpečnost) is brought under consideration. The activities of the StB embraced observation, documentation and forms of indirect censorship as well as constraint. For instance, musicians who wanted to play concerts in the West were investigated (Kajanová 2009, 56). The secret services behind the Iron Curtain relied heavily on secret unofficial informants, often recruited from within the scenes or groups who had been under observation. Relatively often, informants were recruited under duress, while the quality of the information provided varied considerably, to the extent of sometimes being worthless. For instance, Lubomír Dorůžka, renowned for his dedication to jazz and popular music as a publisher, organizer and translator, was revealed as having been an informant under the code name ‘pixa’ by the disputed cibulka-project (<http://www.cibulka.com>, an online database of files from the Czechoslovak secret service) after his death in 2013. The full circumstances remain unclear and require further research, yet the example unveils the complex entanglements that came with the politicization of jazz under Czechoslovak state socialism.

Despite the effects of political conditions and developments on the jazz scene in Czechoslovakia, its organizational and artistic accomplishments were remarkable. Efforts to network and become active internationally can be seen in the co-founding of the international European Jazz Federation in 1964, as well as in international co-operation and study and concert tours abroad. Artistically, an independent fusion of bourgeois orchestral music culture with early jazz emerged almost as early as in other European countries, as can be seen in the compositions of Ježek, for example, a process that was echoed by Pavel Blatný in the 1960s in the area of Third Stream. The early endeavors towards establishing a structured jazz education (especially by Velebný, at least from the 1960s onwards), together with the musicality often attributed to the Czechs, expressed in a high level of playing-for-pleasure evident in many performances, provided for independent compositional and soloistic developments in modern jazz, which, ironically, became internationally known not least because of the politically motivated emigration of key individuals. A particular source of inspiration has been and continues to be Bohemian and Moravian folk songs. Although the use of such sources was declared an essential condition of the acceptance of jazz by the communists around 1950, interest in this area was, and has continued to be, influenced less by that imposition and more by a similar interest to be found in earlier, pre-communist periods, especially among composers of the time. Today, Czech jazz reflects the diversity of international jazz. However, the challenges posed in the twenty-first century by an international music market and the competition between jazz and other forms of popular music, together with changing leisure practices, make it difficult for many musicians to gain international recognition, even within Europe.

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